



The role of input in bilingual development

Dr. Cathy Cohen

Monday, Nov. 7th 12:00pm- 1:30pm

Room 22, (Lower Level), Education Bldg.

It is widely recognised that numerous factors can account for children's balanced dual language acquisition. These include the quantity and quality of current and cumulative input and output, as well as factors related to social contexts, such as SES, language choice with peers, language used for school instruction, language attitudes and cultural identity. Analysis of the roles these factors play is complicated by the dynamic nature of the bilingual acquisition process. Thus, as children's linguistic environments change over time, the roles played by different factors evolve, which leads to shifts in balance between languages as children adjust to their changing communicative needs.

In this talk, I draw on two studies, conducted at an international school in France, which explore the role of input in the development of dual language proficiency. The first study is cross-sectional. Participants were English-French bilingual children aged six to eight. Data on their current and cumulative language exposure and family background were collected through questionnaires given to parents and children. Language proficiency was measured using the standardised French and English versions of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix, a rating scale of oral competence, completed by children's French and English teachers. I explore the relationship between the language proficiency measures and current amount of overall exposure to each language, as well as current input and output quantity and cumulative length of exposure. I also consider to what extent the child's dominant language is a reliable indicator of variables related to language use, including the child's preferred language for speaking and reading, and the language used with peers in the school playground.

The next study, which builds upon the first, is longitudinal and currently in its second year. It follows two groups of English-French bilingual children: the first from first to fifth grade; the second from fifth to ninth grade. The study explores how shifting language exposure patterns through childhood and adolescence impact on different factors relating to dual language acquisition, and it examines how the relationship between these variables evolves as children grow up. It also investigates how specific measures taken by the school and by families might help children who have a more weakly developed language. It is hoped that this study will add to our knowledge and understanding of how two languages are acquired, developed and maintained in an international school setting.



Dr. Cathy Cohen
cathy.cohen@ens-lyon.fr
*Ecole supérieure du professorat et de l'éducation,
Université Lyon 1, France
Laboratoire ICAR, UMR 5191,
Lyon, France*

Refreshments will be served.

